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25 March 1983

Ms Margaret Hennessy  
Counsellor  
Anglo-Irish Division  
Department of Foreign Affairs

Dear Margaret

Please find enclosed a report on the recent visit of Lord Gowrie to Washington. The report has been compiled on the basis of information supplied by various contacts on the Hill and in the media.

Best wishes.

Yours sincerely

*Jim Sharkey*

James A Sharkey  
Counsellor

JAS/msg  
Enclosure

Mr. Sheridan  
This is an interesting report. Pl file on 9/1 and whatever file we use. b. Gowrie  
5/11/2/4  
8.4.83

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CONFIDENTIAL REPORT ON VISIT TO WASHINGTON BY  
LORD GOWRIE : 23rd/24th MARCH 1983

Lord Gowrie's programme in Washington involved a call on the State Department, on the editorial board of the Washington Post, a lunch at the British Embassy, an afternoon meeting with the Friends of Ireland and a background briefing with Chicago Tribune columnist and editorialist Michael Kilian. A basic pitch in Gowrie's presentation was that Irish-Americans had no real awareness of Ulster realities; that Ulster unionism was irretrievably opposed to Irish unity and that realistically the goal of Irish unity should be abandoned for the foreseeable future.

Gowrie was not hostile and indeed came across as conciliatory to the Irish Forum proposal, personally seeing the discussion on a new Ireland as useful. But some observers detected a note of condescension in his approach viz a suggestion that Britain should take some of the credit since it was the Assembly elections that had made it possible and an implication that discussions in the Forum would make Irish nationalists aware that unity was not a realistic objective in the short-term.

(A) Meeting at Department of State: Here Gowrie met in the absence of Burt former Congressman Edward Derwinski of Illinois who now holds the post of Counsellor-designate at D/State. Derwinski effectively lost his seat in a Republican primary about a year ago. He will be a trouble shooter for Shultz, helping particularly on congressional relations and aspects of Eastern European affairs. Ireland is not expected for the moment to be part of his brief.

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As reported to us, nothing very substantial arose at the meeting. Gowrie expressed satisfaction at the St. Patrick's day statements of the Administration. He argued that there had been gradual improvement in the security field throughout 1982 although the Ballykelly bombings had pushed the statistics up. The IRA had fallen back on random assassinations of security personnel and were not any longer in a position to cause serious disruption in Northern Ireland. There was also some discussion of perceptions of the Northern problem in North America, Gowrie mentioning his difficulties in this respect. Derwinski thought that Irish American political interest in Northern Ireland had greatly declined except for recently arrived immigrants. Extremist groups here had unfortunately got a hold of "some flamboyant politicians" - the State Department explained to me that Biaggi was the person that Derwinski had in mind. If this is so, it was interesting and curious that Derwinski should take this line since he was formerly a member of the Ad Hoc Committee (though never really an active one) and we cannot trace any association of his with the Friends of Ireland.

Gowrie briefed Derwinski on the recent Prior economic initiative which was designed to make Northern Ireland a competitive investment location viz a viz the Republic.

(B) Luncheon: Those attending the lunch at the British Embassy in addition to Gowrie and the Ambassador, were Derwinski, the Desk Officer at D/State, a young aide from Kennedy's office, political columnist Tom Braden (who is pro-British and pro-unionist), Tom Foley and a member of the British Embassy staff. Foley is reported as asking whether it was useful to keep the goal of Irish unity to the fore of the debate on Northern Ireland in the United States as the FOI had done recently. Gowrie argued strongly against this, suggesting it was unhelpful. In this connection, the hostile British press reaction to the recent congressional resolution arose for discussion. Why had the reaction been so severe? Gowrie thought the answer lay in the call for Irish unity. The reality was that of one million unionists were adamantly hostile to Irish unity. The goal of Irish unity in the short-term was unrealisable.

Gowrie was reported as saying that no major developments could be expected before the British general election. After the elections in which he expected Mrs. Thatcher to be returned he felt the political momentum in the North would be maintained. He argued in relation to the Assembly that the Assembly in itself was not intended to return devolved government to Northern Ireland. It was designed to provide a framework for devolution and the British had kept their promise to the SDLP not to turn any power over to the Assembly in current circumstances.

One contact was surprised at the positive feelings Gowrie had on a personal level about the Forum "even if he tended to look at it in a peculiar way". It would produce something positive if it led Irish nationalists to discover that Irish unity is not a realistic near-term goal. The British, moreover, could take some credit for the initiative since the Assembly elections had given the SDLP the status to participate in the Forum.

(C) Friends of Ireland: Congressmen Foley, Shannon, McNulty (D-Arizona), Feighan (D-Ohio), Gejdenson (D-Conn), McHugh (D-NY) and Congresswoman Ferraro participated.

The meeting gave Gowrie an opportunity to state the British Government case on issues of concern. The only moment of heightened debate involved plastic bullets which Feighan described as a big issue with elements in the Irish-American community. Gowrie argued that without plastic bullets the security forces would be backed into a difficult situation and open to attack by PIRA sharpshooters. The result would be more Bloody Sundays. Gowrie described Bloody Sunday as Britain's Kent State.

Foley seemed to defend Gowrie's position on plastic bullets. Gowrie argued that the use of plastic bullets was well down, a point which seemed to suggest to some observers that the international focus on the issue had been worthwhile. Gowrie was critical of the SDLP for not taking their seats in the Assembly. Shannon argued that Britain should do more to support the form

of constitutional nationalism which the SDLP represent. It should be clear to all what would happen in Northern Ireland if the SDLP failed.

To the FOI Gowrie argued that unity was a dead issue; an illusion which would never happen and better regarded as such. The unionists, 1/5 of the Irish population, were opposed to unity and would never be seduced. Gejdenson argued that it was just not enough to take the position that a problem was insoluble. Egypt and Israel had come together under the prompting of the U.S. Once movement is commenced, progress can be made. Gowrie argued at another stage that the level of friction between the two communities was something Americans just do not understand. He likened efforts to pull the two communities together to the "bussing" dispute in Boston over the last few years.

On the Forum Gowrie was more conciliatory in his remarks. But he maintained the line that the Assembly had provided the groundwork which had made the Forum possible and seemed to take some of the credit for this new stage in the debate within Irish nationalism. Overall, he thought it was useful for Irish nationalists to at least try to define what they meant by a new Ireland.

Shannon asked about British expenditure on Northern Ireland. Gowrie argued that per capita expenditure in Northern Ireland was higher than in any other part of the UK. In response to a question on the economies North and South, he suggested that the standard of living was higher in the North. He also suggested that the Republic's economy, no less than that of the North, was in trouble. The problem of the Northern Ireland economy was due to a heavy investment outlay on shipbuilding and textiles which he would like to see changed.

Although Gowrie had put it about that his visit to Washington was at the invitation of Senator Moynihan, the Senator's erratic and unpredictable schedule meant that yesterday's intended meeting had to be cancelled. Arrangements were made for the two to meet

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briefly today (24th March) en marge of a joint House-Senate conference on Social Security. It was not considered in the short time available that much substance could arise.

(D) Media Aspects of Lord Gowrie's Visit to the U.S.: Lord Gowrie began the media content of his visit with a morning coffee session with the Editorial Board of the Washington Post. There were very few present. Len Downie, the National Editor, was out of town. Patricia Shakow, the editorial writer on Ireland, was not able to make it and Mary McGrory was apparently not invited.

Gowrie was reported as making a very low-key presentation in which he basically repeated the elements in Prior's briefing to U.S. journalists in London late last week (please refer to telex no. 152 of 21 March containing Ray Moseley's report for the Chicago Tribune's wire service). He saw the Assembly continuing and argued that it was serving a useful purpose. He referred to the Taoiseach's proposal on the establishment of a Forum for consultations in relatively favourable terms. In particular, he thought that it would be useful for Southern politicians to address the implications of opening up a dialogue with the unionist community. He described the main purpose of his visit to the United States as an attempt to ensure that the reality of unionism might be better understood in the United States. (It is noteworthy that while Peter Osnos of the Washington Post attended the Prior briefing in London, the Washington Post decided against carrying his report of that briefing).

In the early afternoon, Gowrie had an extensive interview with Barbara Reynolds of USA Today. This is the first occasion on which the British have attempted to avail of this new nationwide newspaper to convey a message about Northern Ireland. We had the opportunity of briefing Barbara Reynolds in some detail before her interview with Gowrie. She had incidentally received suggested

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questions from the British Embassy all of which concentrated on security aspects of the Northern Ireland problem.

Later in the afternoon, Gowrie had a meeting with Michael Kilian, columnist and editorial writer with the Chicago Tribune. Kilian found Gowrie articulate and concise and one of the better British spokesmen that he has come across in recent years. Kilian, who follows developments in Northern Ireland in considerable detail, had discussed the Forum initiative with the British in the course of last week and at that stage they had briefed him on the basis that there was general policy disarray in Dublin and that the Forum would be a mirror image of the Northern Ireland Assembly in which Fianna Fail and Fine Gael in particular would have considerably difficulty "in burying their differences". Gowrie, on the other hand, reacted in the main in a positive way towards the idea of the Forum and thought that it would be a useful opportunity for parties in the nationalist tradition to clarify, if they could, what sort of a new Ireland they were attempting to attract the unionist population into.

Gowrie told Kilian that in his view a unified Ireland is impossible; the unionist community's loyalty is to the Crown as the symbol of their Protestant heritage and not to England. Consequently, they had little leverage with the leadership of the unionist community in Northern Ireland. At the same time, Britain was not content with the status quo and the British Government continue to hope that there would be a more widespread involvement, specifically by the SDLP, in the Northern Ireland Assembly. According to Kilian, Gowrie was extremely critical of John Hume, both on and off the record. When Kilian made a number of points in defense of Hume's position, with specific reference to his leadership role in the nationalist community over the years, Gowrie said that he could not exonerate Hume from responsibility for the decision not to enter the Assembly although it was undoubtedly the case that he had been persuaded into that position by the former Taoiseach and the SDLP position might well have been different under a government led by Dr. FitzGerald. He thought that the Assembly election had shaken the SDLP out of their complacency; they now had real

competition on the ground from Provisional Sinn Fein and they could no longer rely on the support of the nationalist community irrespective of what decisions they took. Kilian asked Gowrie what, if anything, the British Government might be prepared to do if it still remained a desirable objective to make it possible for the SDLP to enter the Assembly. Gowrie said they would offer nothing to Hume or to the SDLP and to ask such a question was to misunderstand the nature of the British effort in Northern Ireland. What the British Government was doing was providing a framework and an order within which the politicians in Northern Ireland could come together and involve themselves in the political process.

Kilian asked if it was not in the interest of the British Government to counteract some of the more negative developments in the Assembly and as an instance he cited Harold McCusker's opposition to the appointment of John Cushnahan of the Alliance Party to the position of Chairman of the Education Committee. Gowrie's response to this was that there were unionists other than McCusker with whom the SDLP could have a serious dialogue.

In reply to a question from Kilian about the Kennedy resolution, Gowrie said that this was a particularly good example of the trap into which Irish-Americans can so easily fall. It was not true to say that there was a permanent stalemate in Northern Ireland. There was indeed a mechanism for encouraging political progress in Northern Ireland and it was not being used by the nationalist community. However, his main complaint about the Kennedy resolution was that it would inevitably mean an increase in violence in Northern Ireland.

Gowrie did not comment on suggestions by Kilian that Mr. Prior was unlikely to be the next British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. He did, however, say that if it was somebody else, the present policy would continue. There were some who believed that new developments could take place after the next British general election. However, that was to misunderstand the nature of the

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British Government's initiative. Kilian interpreted these remarks to mean that nothing can happen until after Mrs. Thatcher rather than after the next British election. Kilian also remarked that on a couple of occasions in the course of their discussion Gowrie had referred to the fact that Northern Ireland is only 11 miles from Scotland where, he said its true ties lie - something which Kilian believes we may hear a lot more of in the future.

24 March 1983